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# Process Evaluation of the Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE) Project

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In January 2016, the Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill to undertake a process evaluation of the Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE) project. PaCE aims to assist out of work parents into training or employment where childcare is their main barrier to doing so. PaCE was launched in October 2015 for parents aged 25 and over. The project was subsequently extended to parents aged 16-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).
- 1.2 PaCE aims to assist 7,884 economically inactive and unemployed parents<sup>1</sup>, supporting lone parents, parents from a workless household or assisting a (potential) second earner within a working household. The project aims to support at least 1,577 parents into sustainable employment, thereby reducing the number of children living in workless households.

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<sup>1</sup> Parents over the age of 25 are only eligible for PaCE if they are classed as economically inactive. Parents aged 16 to 24 are eligible if they are not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET) and can be economically inactive or unemployed

## **The Evaluation**

- 1.3 The evaluation was commissioned with a process emphasis and the aim of providing insight into:
- the way in which PaCE has been established
  - the project design (and specifically the collaboration between Welsh Government, DWP, and the local authorities)
  - how well PaCE is being administered
  - how effectively it is identifying and engaging with the intended recipients
  - how the project is helping participants to overcome barriers to work, to acquire job-relevant skills, and to take up job-relevant opportunities.
- 1.4 The research involved:
- desk research reviewing the strategic and policy context within which the PaCE project operates
  - a series of stakeholder interviews during February and March 2016 with those involved in the design, management and delivery of the PaCE project
  - a telephone survey of 60 participants of the PaCE project (during March 2016).

## **The PaCE Project**

- 1.5 PaCE is delivered through 43 PaCE Advisers, employed by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) with each local authority having access to a PaCE Adviser. The support offered through PaCE Advisers is aimed at parents living outside of Communities First Areas. Approaches to engagement typically use existing support infrastructure including Flying Start settings, Family Information Services and Families First services.
- 1.6 Parents voluntarily engage with the project, receiving support that is individual to their needs (identified through initial one-to-one discussion). Personal Action Plans, formulated as a result of the discussion, set out the agreed support required.
- 1.7 The support includes; solutions to overcoming childcare barriers, identifying the best solutions for parents who are not work-ready and who require work experience or training, and providing support for accessing sustainable employment to those who are work-ready. Advisers provide mentoring support when participants are in training or on work experience to ensure they remain on track to achieve their goals.
- 1.8 PaCE Advisers establish whether eligible parents require financial assistance to help them overcome barriers to employment which include childcare, travel and/or training costs, or whether advice, information or guidance is most appropriate.

## **2. Key Findings and Recommendations**

## Project Design and Development

- 2.1 The design of the project has drawn heavily on previous experience, replicating the most successful elements of prior initiatives, and revising the model of service delivery where lessons had been learned. Local authorities aided the design process; while some were concerned about the shift (from previous initiatives) of delivery staff from local authority employed community engagement staff to DWP employed PaCE Advisers, it was recognised that the shift in approach offers a more efficient route of provision.
- 2.2 The project has strengthened the relationship between the Welsh Government and the DWP. Partner engagement with local authority representatives has also been an important element of the service, although there is a concern amongst some that the frequency of this engagement had fallen in the months leading up to the research. A decline in engagement and a lack of guidance had led to some local authorities being unclear about their role and responsibilities in relation to PaCE.

**Recommendation 1:** To produce a formal agreement, such as a memorandum of understanding, which sets out the roles and responsibilities of key partners (particularly local authorities) involved in the delivery of PaCE.

## Implementation

- 2.3 The project was launched in two phases; Phase 1 operated in Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion prior to its national roll-out (phase 2). Phase 1 areas were chosen as those local authorities already worked together and were looking to adopt a similar approach. The project initially operated without a full complement of staff, clear guidance for delivery staff or elements of the service model in place.
- 2.4 The rollout of key elements of PaCE (in particular the provision of PaCE funded training) took longer than expected, impacting on the initial delivery of outcomes. This has left the project behind profile in terms of the number of participants engaged and the number of job entries achieved.

- 2.5 The initial lack of funded training - as well as other elements key to the programme's offer - has affected project delivery, with marketing and promotion largely avoided until this provision could be established. Advisers expressed concerns that the lack of promotion materials might impact perceptions of the programme as legitimate.
- 2.6 Misunderstandings were also evident amongst PaCE Advisers, particularly in relation to the application of childcare support and the understanding of the latest benefits legislation. Whilst PaCE Advisers who were newly recruited by the DWP for this project were given intensive training, they desired a project-specific induction process and asked for additional guidance on the training provision available in their area.

**Recommendation 2:** Deliver a project-specific induction process to all PaCE Advisers.

**Recommendation 3:** Develop a frequently asked questions sheet to be used as a working document throughout the remainder of the project.

**Recommendation 4:** Consider introducing a buddying/mentoring system to enable PaCE Advisers to share learning with each other and to raise awareness of the training offer available locally to staff.

**Recommendation 5:** Undertake marketing and promotion using clear and succinct materials, targeting potential partner service providers and participants, to reflect the fact that PaCE is now fully operational.

## Service Integration

- 2.7 Most PaCE Advisers have successfully integrated into the wider family services within each community. Targeting the support outside Communities First Cluster areas has been welcomed by partners, with most identifying this as a gap in service provision. Some areas show mutually beneficial relationships between Family Support settings and PaCE services. This is particularly important when considering that PaCE's target participants often have multiple barriers that typically warrant support beyond that which PaCE Advisers can deliver alone.
- 2.8 The partnership approach has worked particularly well where PaCE Advisers are hot-desking within family settings and are attending/securing positions on key networks of family service providers. In some locations, however, the facilities available for hot-desking or meeting clients are either inappropriately located (e.g. wholly within Communities First Cluster areas) or are simply inappropriate to allow for service delivery, particularly within rural areas. Furthermore, the parents attending family centres typically only change with school terms and these potential routes to the market can be quickly exhausted if attendees are relatively low in number. Consequently, Flying Start centres and other playgroups are less prominent routes to participants and service delivery than anticipated within the business plan.

- 2.9 Conversely, local Jobcentres are proving particularly fruitful routes to recruitment of PaCE participants, with some PaCE Advisers identifying that almost their entire caseload has been recruited through the Jobcentres. The Jobcentres and resources accessible to PaCE Advisers within the Jobcentres provide a useful means for the identification and engagement of eligible participants.
- 2.10 The Jobcentres are currently a fundamental element of PaCE. However, the project is designed on community outreach provision, working closely with partners to reach parents who may otherwise be unwilling to engage. It is unlikely that this cohort will be found within the Jobcentres. With a reliance on Jobcentres, there is also a heightened danger that PaCE may simply be seen by potential participants as an extension of service provision typically offered through the Jobcentres.

**Recommendation 6:** Undertake close monitoring of referral routes to identify trends and patterns in referrals.

**Recommendation 7:** Explore additional mechanisms (and share where successful) to engage Flying Start centres and other family-based settings to increase the diversity of referral/engagement routes for the PaCE project.

**Recommendation 8:** Where there is evidence that service delivery is more challenging in rural areas, explore through discussion with key rural groups, including the Local Action Groups delivering the Rural Development Programme.

### **Service Delivery Approach**

- 2.11 The flexible, person-led approach is welcomed by all stakeholders and participants, which is helped by the lack of defined structure for PaCE. It is important that this flexibility is maintained to allow PaCE Advisers to react to situations and opportunities that arise in the geographical area that they serve. Furthermore, the various resources which PaCE Advisers can draw on are also welcomed, although the extent of demand for them is currently unclear. This is because the lack of PaCE training provision is likely to have restricted levels of demand for childcare provision. As a result, it is unclear whether the available budgets associated with this funding will be fully utilised.

**Recommendation 9:** Maintain the flexibility of operation afforded to the PaCE Advisers in delivering their services.

## Delivery of Outcomes

- 2.12 When considering outcomes, it is important to recognise that PaCE is typically engaging with people who are some distance from the labour market and, prior to engagement with PaCE, are unlikely to be actively seeking employment.
- 2.13 These factors mean that securing sustainable employment outcomes for 20 per cent of participants (the target for PaCE) is a challenge. However, the PaCE model draws heavily upon lessons learnt from recent employability interventions, thereby increasing the chances of meeting this target. Given the distance from the labour market of some participants, mechanisms to effectively measure distance travelled (which are likely to include measures of self-confidence, self-belief and aspirations) could provide additional means to measure the benefits derived from the support.
- 2.14 It is notable that target allocation to PaCE Advisers does not take into account location. A variety of challenges have been identified for PaCE service delivery that are associated with rural areas and/or those areas that suffer from poor infrastructure.

**Recommendation 10:** Introduce robust monitoring of customers' journeys and employment outcomes to identify any locational patterns in service delivery and achievement of outcomes.

**Recommendation 11:** Commission the summative evaluation as soon as it is feasible to capture participant journeys and distance travelled and to provide timely recommendations for PaCE.

## Monitoring

- 2.15 Projects delivered as part of the 2014–2020 European Structural Funds programme should clearly evidence expenditure and activity to ensure compliant and appropriate use of public and European resources. This places an administrative burden on service providers and there is some confusion amongst PaCE Advisers as to what they should be collecting and how it should be collected.
- 2.16 At the time of the research, a review of data capture systems identified gaps in the information recorded and spot checks are now being implemented in response to this issue.

**Recommendation 12:** Incorporate examples of eligible/ineligible evidence in internal guidance/frequently asked questions documentation.

## Performance

- 2.17 The delays in implementing PaCE, combined with a lack of tools/offers to enable the delivery of PaCE, have left the project behind profile in terms of engagement numbers and job entries.
- 2.18 PaCE Advisers were concerned that the target set for helping parents into employment is challenging. It is difficult to determine the scale of challenges, as, at the time of the research PaCE was not fully operational. Furthermore, the availability of suitable opportunities, which is beyond the control of the project, will affect the deliverability of this target.

**Recommendation 13:** Review project profiling six months after the project has been fully operational to identify whether a re-profiling of targets is necessary.

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Full Report available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-parents-childcare-employment-project/?lang=en>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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